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AUTHOR McDonald, Marya; Castleton, Geraldine

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ABSTRACT

This document critiques various discourses about mentoring within the context of adult learning environments in general and adult literacy programs in particular. Mentoring is defined as an enabling or developmental relationship that occurs in partnerships wherein experienced individuals kindle knowledge and offer support to prot,g,s in joint ventures to experiment and learn within the context of encouragement and reinforcement. The booklet's first two sections examine the traditional discourses of formal, informal, and "marginal" mentoring and alternative discourses of dialogic, monologic, and dialogic/monologic mentoring that are said to have more in common with conceptualizations of literacy as social practice. Next, key principles of the discourse on mentoring are illustrated through the case study of a "self-help" city. In the case study, human service providers working in a major Australian capital city and serving disadvantaged, low-skilled clients function as literacy "brokers." The case study is followed by a discussion that and offers insights into perceptions of literacy and mentoring by focusing on the following issues: competing and conflicting discourses; approaches to mentoring literacy practice; "social" literacy as mentoring practice; responding to local literacy need by building bridges through "social" literacy; "public" and "private" literacy in local practice; meeting need through mentoring; and policies promoting mentoring. The bibliography lists 33 references. (MN)

Mentoring in Adult Learning Contexts:

Partners in Dialogue

Marya McDonald
&
Geraldine Castleton

Queensland Centre of the Adult Literacy & Numeracy
Australian Research Consortium
Griffith University

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Queensland Centre of the Adult Literacy & Numeracy
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Griffith University

&

Geraldine Castleton
Centre for Literacy & Language Education Research
Griffith University

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Introduction

The use of the term "mentoring" and the processes implied therein has achieved a high degree of acceptance in many contexts as disparate as friendships, study groups, community development and urban renewal projects, human resource management and front line employee supervision in workplaces and industries. Mentoring also occurs in peer tutoring/supervision in formal and informal educational contexts at all levels and involves both clients of education and training services and professional peers.

This booklet sets out to critique various discourses about mentoring and thereby elucidate the complexity of the issues involved. It describes what mentoring does and could perhaps mean in the different contexts in which it occurs. After a discussion of the terms and discourses contained in the literature about mentoring, we shall examine these concepts in practice by close consideration of a case study. The study details aspects of mentoring literacy 'brokers' in a disadvantaged community of the low skilled clients of the human service providers in a major Australian capital city.

The literature review sets up oppositions between conventional mentoring styles and some new dialogic approaches which we claim have more in common with conceptualisations of literacy as social practice. The case study material sets the context of activity, namely community literacy brokering involving effective mentorship in an adult learning environment. However, the application of the practical tasks upon which this example of mentorship relied has theoretical, ideological, pedagogical and strategic implications wider than mentoring in community programs into a range of contexts encountered in all learning organisations and environments. Hence the writers' interest in proceeding from an instance of socially constructed mentoring in adult community literacy programs to writing about brokering adult learning in other contexts and finally into mentoring in generic adult learning environments.

What is Mentoring?

Put into its simplest and most accessible terms, 'mentoring' is an intellectual way of describing a "method of working together" (Sawyer, 2001). It is also conventionally understood as an enabling or developmental relationship (Kram, 1985). Mentoring occurs in a partnership (rather than by an unsupported individual left to accumulate experience and expertise by their own devices) wherein knowledge is kindled and support offered to the protégé in the joint venture to experiment and learn within a context of encouragement and reinforcement (Boreen et al, 2000).

The 'mentor' is usually named by that term alone, although some of the functions which they perform could entitle them to be described alternatively as 'facilitators', 'sponsors' or 'auspicers'. The mentor can be a self selected individual relating to one (or several) chosen or self selected 'protégé(s), who in some literature are referred to as either 'mentees', 'charges', 'novices' or 'trainees'. Then again, the mentor can be an employee who is required to undertake this responsibility by management as part of their job. In this case, the protégé is often equally without volition in the decision that mentoring is appropriate and will occur. For the most part, this booklet will use the terms 'mentor' and 'protégé' in describing roles and functions, except for quotation from the case study sources which use different descriptors.

Literature on this subject describes the relationship of the mentor and protégé, within the parameters of the joint tasks and context in which they are cooperatively engaged. It abounds with shades of meaning as to the range of tasks and attributes that mentoring can encompass. Broadly speaking the literature traditionally defines the act of mentoring as occurring on three levels, ***formal, informal*** or ***'marginal' mentoring*** (Ragins, Cotton & Miller, 2000).

Traditional Discourses of Mentoring

Formal and informal mentoring and 'marginal' mentors.

To most writers on mentoring, the focus in the relationship is equally upon the mentor and protégé, although the context and purposes of the experience will directly influence expectations about processes and anticipated outcomes (Ehrich, Tennent & Hansford, 2000). However, regardless of dissimilar contexts like mentoring in adult community education versus mentoring in workplace training (which lead to different expectations and which is the focus of the Ehrich et al. work), the mentor is usually described first or is given an implied privileged position. This occurs even where writers emphasise the advantages of mentoring to the protégé. In these cases, despite a principal focus on the benefit to the recipient of the mentoring activity, the common perception of the protégé is still of an initiate or novice holding a lesser position, either in terms of age, inexperience, incomplete training, unproductive return or unaccomplished upward career mobility. The privileging of the mentor tends to occur by virtue of a number of factors. These include greater experience, knowledge, capacity to deliver knowledge 'products', and ability to offer guidance whilst engaged in supervision. Other personal factors are linked to mentoring such as commitment, proven work track record, personality, organisational position and capacity for providing instructional and support needs.

Formal mentoring

For some writers, mentoring is inextricably linked to the notion of a role model, as well as a skills coach, for the protégé. Although this may often occur, this role modeling becomes problematic in cases where mentors themselves are not voluntary but have the task and the protégé imposed as a job requirement. Whether or not they were expected to be (and actually went on to become) role models, mentors are generally described as that according to the contexts in which they operate. For instance, in the industrial or managerial workplace they are described as

> *individuals with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing upward mobility and career support to their proteges (Ragins et al, 2000).*

Mentoring which puts an emphasis on the productivity returns involved in the experience, the roles and responsibilities taken up by the co-partners, the profitability of the program to management, and the increased careerism of the

protégé could best be described as ***"formal"*** mentoring. Crucially, formal mentoring develops in contexts, particularly workplaces, with organisational assistance or intervention, usually in the form of management matching mentors and protégé according to a set of criteria derived by and from the administration. Not all of these workplaces are industry based, nonetheless within the United States, one third of the nation's major companies have formal mentoring programs (Bragg, 1989) and formal mentoring has been identified as an emerging workplace management trend in the new millennium (Tyler, 1998). Additionally, research comparing mentored and non mentored individuals reveals consistent results in industrial contexts, namely that the former report greater career satisfaction (Fagenson, 1989), career commitment (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990) and career mobility (Scandura 1982). Finally, they are reported to have more positive job attitudes (Scandura, 1997).

Informal mentoring

The emphasis in informal mentoring is similar to a situation like mentoring trainee teachers where the mentor as a role model is attributed with characteristics like

> *develop(ing) notions of collaboration, empowerment and reciprocity as essential elements in a mentoring partnership ... achiev(ing) the delicate balance between intimacy and professional distance and address(ing) the distinction between mentoring and supervision (Boreen et al., 2000).*

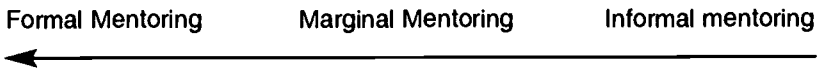
This process rather more loosely defines ***"informal"*** mentoring. Management intrusion is not quite as explicit in the focusing of objectives and outcomes around increased professional development as distinct from productivity and career advancement. What distinguishes informal mentoring is the way in which these relationships develop more from mutual identification than by intervention. That is, mentors often choose protégés as less experienced versions of themselves and protégés select mentors whom they idealise to an extent as role models. This mutual identification contributes to the often cited closeness and intimacy of the mentoring relationship (Kram, 1985). In addition, informal mentoring relationships are often relatively unstructured. The partners meet as often as needed over the course of the relationship, unlike formal mentorships which can operate more like limited work contracts for many participants.

Ragin's description (2000) of mentoring for career mobility and productivity illustrates the dynamic often seen in discourses relating to workplace mentoring. Here the power differential in access to upward career movement and greater job opportunities (hence achievement of greater organisational productivity) is always implied and sometimes explicitly stated. This is in contrast to discourses which deal with informal mentoring in educational or community contexts

where the power relationship is gentler and more covert and the approach less formal. The mentoring relationship is often expressed in phrases like the knowledge, training or experience gap, usually couched in personal terms like enabling the growth of self value and mutual esteem, and maturation of personal outlooks through knowledge and the application of meta-critical processes. Per se, these terms have little to do with otherwise professional career advancement objectives. Generally, the discourse around informal mentoring focuses on the growth in self esteem and mutual respect of mentor and protégé alike. Nonetheless, translated to organisational contexts, these same qualities can be termed team building or bonding and are very organizational in character and outcome.

Marginal mentoring

"Marginal" mentoring is a construct which seeks to accommodate the needs of the protégé as the primary focus of the whole process. In that sense, it falls closest to a softer approach to professional development as opposed to careerism and increased organisational productivity. This approach argues that the mentor should offer "just enough, just in time" assistance which is "just good enough", "limited, but still of value" (Ragins et al, 2000). The objective is that in a continuum of experience from 'highly mutually satisfactory, informal mentoring' to 'unsatisfactory, highly structured formal mentoring', marginal mentoring represents a happy middle point where the experience is perceived to be of some benefit to all parties and, above all, does no harm to the protégé. This continuum can be represented diagrammatically as follows



The literature recommends that marginal mentoring activities be delivered in an unobtrusive, esteem enhancing method by the mentor to facilitate the personal and professional development of their protégé. It is not therefore a differently theorised position of itself, rather a methodology to achieve "soft" mentoring outcomes for the protégé, without unnecessary expenditure of effort or exercise of power by the mentor.

Summarised, these two theoretical constructs of formal and informal mentoring, mediated by the technique of marginal mentoring as a client centred approach, offer the traditional view of how mentoring activity can best be practicably pursued, given the context in which the outcomes and objectives are located. However more modern thinking about mentoring sees it as occurring in a generic context called 'the learning environment' and proposes an entirely different conceptual model and a practical methodology for its application. The

case study of community literacy brokerage provides practical examples of alternative conceptions of mentoring and illustrates how mentoring in this context can be extended from the particular context to the generic environment of adult learning.

Alternative Discourses of Mentoring

Dialogic mentoring

It may be useful in a debate which seems to polarise along traditional lines to adapt the works of writers like Bokeno and Gantt (2000) who do not deal in dichotomies (like, for instance, the differences between mentoring in workplaces and educational or community settings) but focus on transformative change within organisational learning cultures wherever they are sited. In this way, Bokeno and Gantt offer

> *a conception of mentoring as a specially viable site for the relational development and generative processes anticipated by learning organisations. This conception of mentoring derives from a dialogic understanding of the nature of relationships, and differs sharply from the conventional understanding of professional development relationships. In so doing, this understanding contributes to a communication foundation for genuine transformational practices in organisations aspiring to learn (p. 238).*

Basing their theorisation on an interest in dialogue and its application to organisational change first proposed by early organisational learning theorists like Senge (1990) and W. Isaacs (1993, 1999), these writers see organisational learning as essentially a social interaction process. What is additionally characteristic of organisational learning within social interaction in any site in which it occurs is that the learning itself is focused on being a member of a team of learners and innovators

> *...workplace learning is best understood then in terms of the communities being formed or joined and personal identities being changed. The central issue in learning is becoming a practitioner and not learning about practice (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p. 48).*

This conception of mentoring offers a close interaction with theories of literacy enacted as social practice within various "communit[ies] of practice" (Street, 1995), a terminology which Brown and Duguid themselves employ, and which social capital theorists like Falk (2001) also use. According to Falk, social capital is an essential ingredient for effective social interaction. In this claim, he highlights its importance in proactive community development and the growth of a learning culture within whichever organisation it may occur. Additionally,

theories of dialogic mentoring offer a fertile site for the development of relationships and other generative processes which ought to be anticipated and planned for by any learning organisation as part of its organisational culture. Dialogic mentoring revolves around a concept of learning in an open system where, theoretically, practice and performance should be fused or joined, rather than separated out into their own closed sub-systems.

> *The point of open systems is the pursuit of learning via amplification of deviation-mistakes as opportunities for growth rather than resolution, alternatives for exploration rather than exclusion (Bokeno & Gantt,2000, p.239).*

By cultivating an environment where learning occurs in open systems, moving away from standard testing to a social emphasis on communication, the focus is on facilitating continuous questioning and the replacement of organisational standard thinking. The case study, which concentrates on disadvantaged communities and service delivery to low skilled clients without formal educational attainment, presents some examples of mentoring in adult basic education so that an effective learning culture develops around this activity. From the community need for this basic education are drawn its two greatest component parts viz. language/literacy instruction and numeracy instruction as arenas for dialogic mentoring of clients. The case study itself gives features of this mentoring activity in practice. It also offers a paradigm for extension of brokerage from the community literacy program out into other adult learning environments.

Monologic mentoring

It is important to understand what dialogue and generative learning relationships come to mean in discussions about "dialogic" as opposed to "monologic" mentoring. Most mentoring is understood in terms of conventional monologic themes. These reflect or intend unilateral, uninterrupted movement towards some posited objective goal, steered by common assumptions about the "true", "correct" and "right" way to do things. These themes operate upon stability, clarity and equilibrium; deviation is an undesired state which requires a corrective response (Bokeno & Gantt, 2000). Developmental relationships are charted along a linear path to mutually anticipated and preferred goals and objectives. To paraphrase Weik's (1979) terminology, the mentor functions as a handy resource of assembly rules for regulating the uncertainty of the protégé. An example of the approach which aims to produce protégés who are 'copies' of the skills displayed by their mentor was recorded in the talk of an interviewee in the case study. This person was a Manager of a Multi-Cultural Neighbourhood

Centre (who was the only Anglo-Saxon employee of the organisation) who reported on the low written literacy skills of volunteers and professional, ESL colleagues

> *I have to get out the red pen .....Coming from the Council which is quite bureaucratic, mainly white Anglo, you know, and coming here and ...um the level of skill or the level of written skill I guess particularly, not the language skill, not the spoken, for me, yeah, has been quite a concern I guess even through some of the professional workers... when I first came here I was actually quite shocked I guess.*

From his overall talk, there was no doubt that he believed and trusted in the quality of the service that his colleagues were providing. Nonetheless, he clearly positioned text based reporting (at which he excelled) as primarily important for their mentorship of their clients. By implication, he was categorising his ESL colleagues' verbal abilities as a secondary, perhaps a less valued, form of communication. His mentoring practice was clearly to augment the text skills of his proteges to make them reliable copiers of his own skills and thence able transmitters of this competence to their clients.

This interviewee also identified in his talk features of literacy practice which writers like Barton and Hamilton (1998) have called "institutional" and "vernacular" literacy. The terms distinguish the differences in practice between literacy used for formal bureaucratic or operational contexts ("institutional") and literacy employed in everyday community and social practices ("vernacular"). This interviewee identified the features of his colleagues' literacy practices which could be deemed either "institutional" and/or "vernacular". Additionally, he passed a moral judgement on their use of these literacies, clearly identifying the prominence he gave to the former. By extrapolation, it was not unreasonable to surmise that he felt that his protégés should be prioritising the same activities as he undertook with them with their mentored clients.

This practitioner's beliefs occurred because, in a monologic system, the developmental relationship involved in mentoring is a distributive one with a fixed pool of resources from the outset. Interaction processes are sender/source or expertise oriented, more likely to be closed and impermeable to new, inter-subjective, innovative or mutually constructed meanings which are not already existing, fixed, known and shared. If new meanings do arise, there is a danger that they may disrupt effective, expertise based transmission and also the relational equilibrium which is based on an understanding of this expertise and its power.

Summarily, monologic mentoring tends to highlight organisational tradition and politics and indicate culturally appropriate and historically effective ways of

thinking and acting within a dominant culture. Such mentoring seeks sameness in the reproduction of organisational culture and performance norms. In the end, the learning outcomes are likely to be those of adaptation, error prevention or correction, or reduction of deviation, ie single loop processes.

Dialogic and monologic mentoring

In a system which operates around dialogic mentoring however, dialogue itself is seen as

> *collaborative, mutually constructive, critically reflective, participatory and an emergent engagement of relationships among self, other and world (Bokeno & Bokeno, 1998, p.54).*

This broadly based view of the function and character of dialogue within learning environments synthesises some crucial components of extant dialogue theory. As well, it contains some guiding principles for successful social interaction, specifically that behavioural transactions be both equitable and empathetic, that they be outward looking and reflective, that they flow over time and through the experience of many views and voices and that they allow a sense of genuine inquiry and exploration. Seen as social interaction, mentored learning activities should depend upon and enact some underlying rules and principles such as

- a genuine concern and respect for the other person in the interaction,
- ability and willingness to engage both in individual and collective reflection,
- striving for authenticity in speaking ably and willingly about one's thoughts, ideas and assumptions.

Additionally, valued mentor functions commonly include counseling, advising and social support and advocacy in relationships highlighted by candour, some emotional investment and an in-depth understanding of the other. Protégé reports of successful mentoring also include descriptions of features best associated with "learning leaders" (Argyris, 1993) such as facilitating, coaching and modeling, although with a wider emphasis on opening whole new doors to learning and "hosting a new world" (Burke & McKeen,1990, p.322). These characteristics were significantly reported among dialogic mentors in the case study.

This view, based upon effective social interaction and interchange between equally valid voices, is in stark contrast to traditional conceptions of mentoring which see effective relational dynamics as fueled primarily by forces of sameness. If the goal of learning organisations is the normative sense of continual exploration, then the goal of the relationships within them should be the active, continual cultivation of a sense of contradiction that would permit

such exploration. Nowhere is this more feasible than in mentoring relationships, already explicitly designed as learning experiences.

The dialogic mentoring relationship also provides a more immediate and localised context for the transfer of learning The dyadic relationship is often seen as crucial for learning development and substantial educational literature, particularly in special needs and adult education writing, supports the effectiveness of one-on-one or, at best, small group learning experiences. A dyadic mentoring relationship also tends to be devoid of performance assessment or test-like characteristics. Thus anxiety about learning can be significantly reduced, an important factor in low skilled adult clients or cohorts who have previously had poor educational experiences. This feature was prominently reported by the case study clients with low literacy skills.

In the context of delivering a mentored service in literacy/numeracy training to low skilled clients, mentoring takes place on a continuous basis and is comparatively inexpensive, as dialogic mentors need only be committed volunteers with skills training and an understanding of the dynamics of effective and equitable social interaction. Furthermore, dialogically competent mentoring in both literacy/numeracy and other contexts in learning environments is a viable means of initiating organisational learning processes and a perception of the power to influence them from the bottom up. Mentors themselves are participants in this process which is as tangible as admiration, idealisation as a role model and recognition from their protégé. Ultimately, as Merriam (1983) writes

> *The fundamental question is not how mentoring leads to material success but how it relates to adult learning...[I]f mentoring can be shown to contribute to the capacity for working, living and learning, we might readily cultivate such relationships (p.171)*

Indeed such might be the learning culture that the accomplished and learned might celebrate the opportunity to continue to learn.

Introduction to the case study

The first part of this booklet considered traditional views in literature about mainstream monologic mentoring in its various manifestations as formal, informal or marginal mentoring methodology and also proposes the greater potential of dialogic mentoring. The second part of the booklet offers a case study which highlights aspects of the literature and also indicates the greater potential for individual skills growth and community capacity building offered by the dialogic approach in adult basic education contexts. The case study covers a large range of human service providers and their clients and the prime examples of dialogic mentoring tended to occur specifically in language and literacy related contexts, whilst elsewhere in service provision practices overtly monologic themes and behaviours were more strongly in evidence.

Case Study

A detailed case study conducted to explore perceptions of clients' literacy needs among service providers in a disadvantaged semi-urban community of a major Australian capital city.

This case study was conducted among stakeholders and clients of community services in a disadvantaged regional city called by the pseudonym 'Selfhelp City' on the outskirts of a major capital city. The study explored at a local level the perceptions of literacy need which stakeholders who deliver services held about their clients, and the capacity for productive relationships among different community-based groups that work with people typically defined in adult literacy and social welfare discourses as "disadvantaged". The incapacity of these clients to participate in the knowledge economy, either as independent learners or as participants in the discourses of 'knowledge work', occurred because of low formal educational attainment and other factors of disadvantage. In this circumstance, mentoring activities in adult basic education, particularly literacy and numeracy, represented education of last resort and as such became highly problematic. The practical application of programs and strategies used by mentors or 'literacy brokers' in this context became of relevance to a gamut of adult learning situations and the quality and application of mentoring activity thus became worthy of reproduction and dissemination.

Participants included representatives from community-based organisations such as administrators, welfare officers, health workers, counselors, voluntary

workers and members of the wider community, for example participants in inter-agency networks. Clients of two community-based organisations were invited to participate in the project.

A cameo of 'Selfhelp City'

The population demographics of the 'City of Selfhelp' in all respects indicated the likelihood that significant groups in this city are at Levels 1 to 3 on the scales of literacy articulated by the Survey of Adult Literacy (SAL, ABS, 1996). Even more pertinently, significant groups in the 'Selfhelp' population are drawn from those sub-sets which share factors of age, educational attainment, income distribution, ESL background and employment status or welfare dependency likely to predispose them to showing both higher characteristics of disadvantage but also lower literacy/numeracy skills than the wider population.

Families in 'Selfhelp' are young and often with a sole adult earner. Educational attainment is low with 64.97% of the population over 15 years without formal post compulsory educational qualifications (ABS Population Census, 1996). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of 'Selfhelp City' is small but young, underemployed or unemployed. The city also has significant pockets of NESB residents and refugee enclaves. Because private housing is still relatively affordable and low cost public housing provision still available, there is a likelihood of continued population growth in a lower income, lower educational attainment sector which is predisposed to literacy disadvantage.

Precariousness of prospective employment in 'Selfhelp', especially for young people, is high and likely to remain so and the SAL indicates the strong correlation between low socio economic status, low income and low literacy skills. 'Selfhelp' is under represented in outlets for Community Services, Government Administration and Education services. Hidden unemployment or 'underemployment' is high with a very large number of residents working in part time and casual jobs or a significant number in receipt of Social Security income. These individuals reflect the characteristics of the SAL which equated both low income and/or little or no labour market participation with low literacy skills. Unemployment services in 'Selfhelp City', including literacy and numeracy training, have been materially eroded since 1996. Education, community and health services have not yet been sufficiently expanded to make transformative change in the community.

Insights into Perceptions of Literacy and Mentoring in 'Self-help City'

Interviews were conducted with community providers to examine more closely the relationship between established indicators of low literacy attainment and the day to day experiences of people with low literacy skills in the area under study. Interviewees were selected for the various perspectives they could offer on the relationship between literacy and life trajectories. They were members of the particular context of social activity and were practical actors involved in the ongoing achievement and enactment of that context. Everyday tasks were overwhelmingly conducted through language so an analysis of the talk of members of any particular context became an invaluable way of inquiring into the social world. As each interviewee had some knowledge of the relationship between literacy and life trajectories, the researchers assumed that they would be able to interpret these concepts in a meaningful way that would be shaped and constrained by their orientation to institutions, practices and settings (Castleton, Jewell et al, 1999:113). These insights and the way they are enacted in practices like those involved with mentoring literacy/numeracy assistance is often predicated upon power relationships or the (mis?)perception of power relationships. If the mentor is striving for a truly dialogic interaction, it is proper to appreciate that much mentoring activity is approached by the protégé with the perception of a power imbalance generally not favouring themselves. Why this occurred in this case study will be discussed in the following sections.

Competing and conflicting discourses

Within interviewees' talk about literacy practices, three streams of reflectivity emerged which are termed "Public" to cover the domain of public or 'institutional' literacy operations, "Social" to cover the domain of community usages of literacy and "Private" to cover personal or 'vernacular' literacy practices. These three groupings or ways of being (discourses) enabled each of the informants, in various ways, to categorise people (including themselves) according to their literacy skills and literate practices, as well as to explain how and why literate practice varies according to the categories into which people are assigned. One cannot claim that there is no overlap between foci and concerns, nor transfer between one discourse or another. But for those speakers in the "Public" and "Private" discourses, this tended to be their predominant type, with occasional shifts to other discourses only to return to their principal form.

The first stream of talk was what could be called the "Public" or 'institutional' domain of discourse, that is, responses which talked about literacy in the organizational, bureaucratic, institutional or operational context. This level of response was generally most characteristic of individuals who were located within the public arena and had provenance of public programs, and responsibility for administration of public funds and sometimes for literacy/numeracy programs.

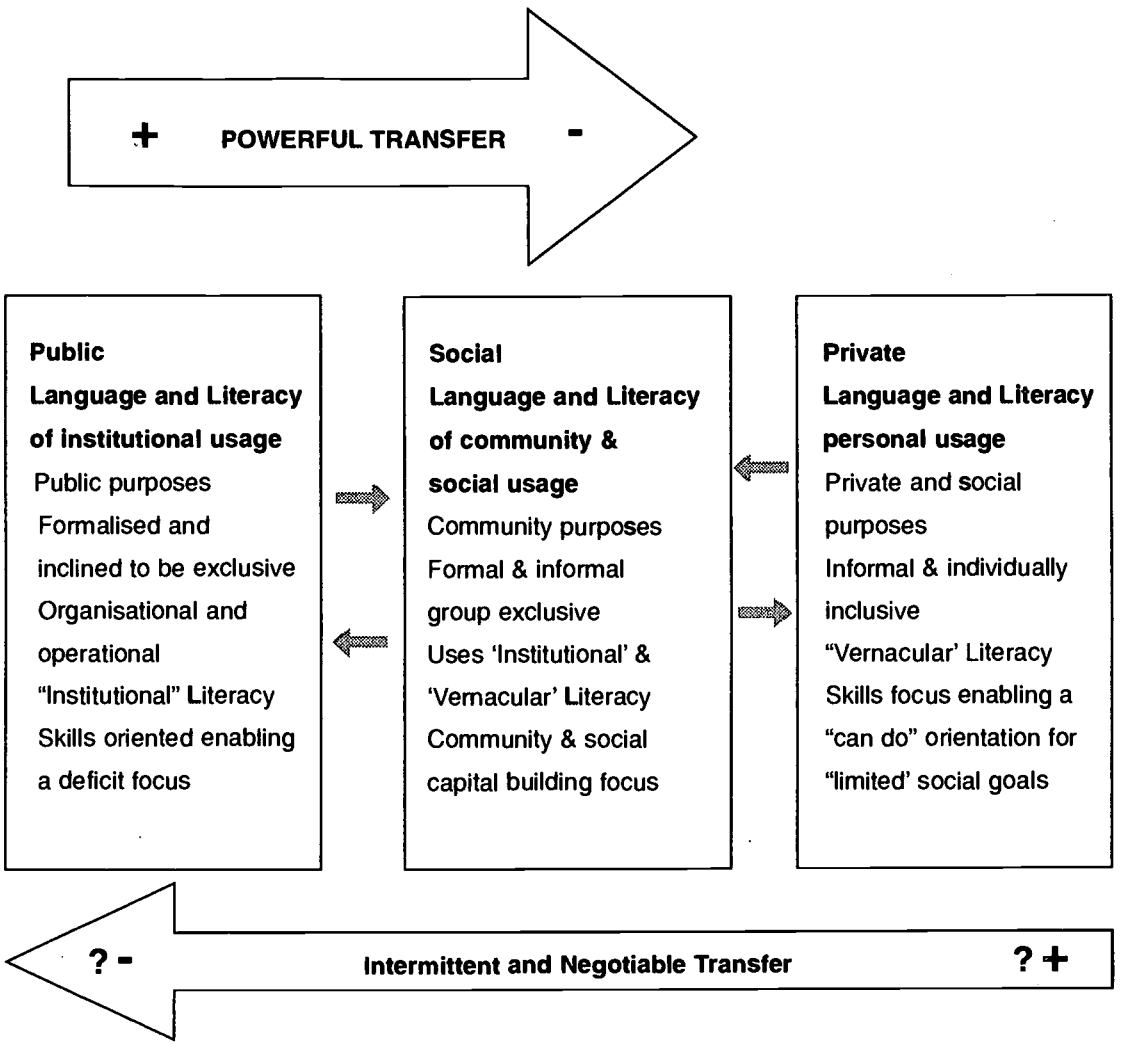
The second area identified was the "Social" or community level of discourse. This involved responses about the ramifications of literacy use for social or community life. These were generally characteristic of literacy and other service practitioners and those with a professional interest in urban planning/development or community renewal. Some responses from individuals predominantly in the "Public" area could be identified here as well, especially where they had responsibility for, or interest in, community projects.

The final area was the immediately "Private" or 'vernacular' level of discourse and was most characteristic of some, but not all, practitioners and most clients themselves. Even individuals from the "Public" arena resorted to this level when asked for their view of the meaning and uses of literacy and to attribute characteristics to low skilled clients which they observed in their professional experience .

The diagram on the next page indicates categories of literacy users and their attributes, relationships and transference between the three areas identified in the talk.

The arrows which indicate influences both back and forward from the central position are generally reciprocal and balanced. This reveals the balance between usage, values and purposes which simultaneous users of 'institutional' and 'vernacular' (which we define as "Social") literacy practices can make in all their own literate operations, and also transfer to make meaning out of the practices of other users. Interestingly, the arrows which indicate the transfer of power and perception between these groups also acted as a de facto predictor of a certain style of mentoring relationship and behaviour, as will be further explained in this booklet through examples from the talk. In fact, it will be a central contention of this work that it is in this "Social" category that dialogic mentors are commonly found. By using balanced skills, they enable literacy to be part of social interaction between peers. In this activity, they achieve the social interaction of dialogic mentoring.

The arrows which marked the flow of influence from the two outlying figures are larger but simultaneously much more problematic in terms of the power of these influences. The arrow from the "Public" to the "Private" domain is shorter and more powerful as defined by users; the arrow in reverse is longer and more attenuated because the negotiated reciprocal influence is not as



palpable, nor is it perceived by users to be actually as powerful. This (mis?) perception of power occurred because bureaucratic discourses in the "Public" arena can mediate relationships in particularly controlling ways. A power differential enables the categorising work that people do to position the users of their own discourses but, equally importantly, significant others who do not use the same discourses. The latter are then 'judged' in relation to the formal literacy practices of the bureaucratic user.

It will be argued that the central "Social" set of characteristics represents a preferred model of practice for potential service provision for disadvantaged communities like 'Selfhelp City'. This is because it operates 'above and beyond' the bureaucratic and deficit based judgements which 'institutional' users often make about 'vernacular' users. It is contended that, within the "Social" literacy practices of this group, conditions exist for facilitating a truly dialogic approach to mentoring within a community which has expressed and perceived

literacy/numeracy needs. Drawing upon the balance of skills, purposes, values and attitudes found in this group enables appropriate mentoring by skilled practitioners or, equally, sometimes more effectively, by "trusted literacy brokers" (Hull, 1997) recruited from the community's ranks.

Approaches to mentoring literacy practice

Some examples have been selected from the talk to give comparisons of the types and character of mentored activity which was spontaneously occurring for clients with perceived limited literacy and numeracy skills within 'Selfhelp City'. The first example comes from a private provider who was both the trainer and the curriculum designer for low skilled women undertaking pre-vocational training in literacy and aiming at an eventual return to work. She stated that

> *friends and family members are often in exactly the same boat as themselves ... they have someone who interprets on behalf of the group. Well they're talking about the CES and you know, it's long gone*

implying that "trusted brokers" or mentors often share the same social circumstances as the recipients of their literacy skills. Furthermore, the currency and reliability of these skills and the actual information from the mentor was subjective and inaccurate, therefore less powerful. The informant's perception implied that the limited circumstances shared by the "broker" with the client actually also mediated the power and currency of literacy skills, a monologic theme of concern for stasis and replication.

The second example comes from a former refugee, now a worker with the Multi-Cultural Centre, who uses 'vernacular' literacies in his personal and client interactions but also uses 'institutional' literacy practices in his interactions with businesses, employers and bureaucracies on their behalf. He expressed a wish for a form of 'institutional' literacy for his clients but on their terms and in their own languages, a dialogic theme of equally heard and valued voices in social interaction. His interpretation of literacy was complex

> *For me, the ability to communicate in reading and writing to manage your own life ... but working in partnerships with for example with the businesses in the area, OK . So it's employment training and language training at the same time ... promote projects in communities language and I think that was a very effective way ...I think translation is very important to have, to have information in community language*

He reported that 'vernacular' users, in literacy practices revolving around spoken fluency in their own communities,

> *limit and restrict that world by choice here. I find ... interacting, that's a*

common thing, they don't want to interact (sic) (with mainstream communities) (author's emphasis)

The implication of his talk was that ethnic community speakers relied upon their own "brokers" whose dealings with external agencies were often culturally circumscribed. He made the judgement that this circumscription was a matter of choice and that cultural constraints sometimes mitigated the actual literacy skill of the "broker".

The categorisation of clients with only a single 'vernacular' form of literacy (in the view of users of both "Public" and "Social" literacy) was summed up in the following telling comment

they can't say "No" because, like everybody else, they just want the same standard of living and I find that a major impact of not having literacy skills is that they can't order their lives and it's something that our people take for granted, but it's something they can't do (author's emphasis)

This view juxtaposed two different kinds of worlds, sorted 'them' and 'us' into two different kinds of people, characteristic of the 'natural' and 'commonsense' tendency to work in binaries. The first world was ordered and filled with people who have the skills to regulate and manage life; the second world was disordered and populated by individuals without these organising skills. Thus the informant was not only offering a description of their perceptions of the world(s) but also offering a moral or value judgement on the character and quality of life of the inhabitants.

Clearly, the power balance between such disparate worlds appears to be unequal. The prospect that a monologic mentoring experience could be successful where the mentor is drawn from one world, but the protégé recruited from another world with an entirely different mindset, behaviour, experience, values and use for literacy practice in daily living, is quite problematic. In fact, the type of mentoring which most often occurs in situations where there is a strong perception of an unequal power differential is monologic in character. The mentor strives to get the protégé to replicate sameness with understood and perceived common ends, ends which have an implicit ideological content and make implied value judgements. The whole process thus becomes self-limiting and likely to lose momentum as equality in knowledge capital and distribution becomes closer. On the other hand, if the establishment of those rules of social interaction which are the guiding principles of dialogic mentoring are evident and working, the experience can prove worthwhile and ongoing for both the participants and the whole learning environment.

"Social" literacy as mentored practice

The case study also revealed that interviewees in the "Social" category, for example dialogically mentoring, literate practitioners envisaged all the barriers in daily living which 'vernacular' users must leap in order to simply take charge of survival needs. What is significant about their role as mentors is that generally they projected empathy and understanding, even identification, when describing these barriers for their clients. In the juxtaposition of the power of the protégé with that of the mentor, the 'knowledge' or 'expertise' of the mentor was not especially privileged over other factors in the relationship, viz the protégé's ability to negotiate strategies around literacy skill shortfalls in order to accomplish the social tasks of daily living.

In summary, users of "Social" literacy practices were in the dichotomous position of identifying a polarity between their own capacities and those of users 'limited' by low skills. However, it is vital to note that, at the same time, they described the skills which these individuals employ for the benefit of the community. They also readily acknowledged the valuable achievement of personal and social goals by 'vernacular' users in limited social contexts. These contexts included friendship and family interest groups, especially constructed learning circles, special training programs like targeted parent education programs and women's health talks, and forums specifically created for proactive participation e.g. consultative processes in the local community renewal project. The "Social" literacy practitioner in the role of advocate also argued persuasively for funded programs which anticipate the needs of strongly 'vernacular' users. They recognised the need for appropriate materials, pedagogy and strategies within program delivery for disadvantaged clients with low formal educational attainment. Additionally, they were the strongest proponents of an approach to lifelong learning which enabled the community to access and use learning environments over a continuing chain of intersections in the individuals' and the community's life, as distinct from formal places like work and school.

Above all, users who were confident and competent with "Social" literacy practices were able to do four things. The first was to understand and value 'vernacular' users in their own linguistic terms and draw on their discourses in reply. Secondly, they were able to generate a discourse both to and on behalf of 'vernacular' users which used the key features of the 'institutional' form and which addressed issues related to bureaucratic institutions and demands in appropriate terms. Thirdly, they were able to pin-point the disjunctions between these two discourses and, in the case of many workers in literacy, actually mentor the teaching of blended "Social" and 'vernacular' literacy which would be suitable for meeting many basic 'institutional' language and literacy demands for primarily 'vernacular' users. Finally they were able to amalgamate the provision of learning opportunities into a philosophy and pedagogy of lifelong

learning which did not limit adult education to formal educational institutions or settings nor rely on provision of learning sites and funded programs in workplaces. Thus they were readily able to mentor literacy programs away from traditional schooling approaches and into adult education in community contexts.

Four examples of this mentored "Social" literacy approach were reported in the talk in this project. They were literacy programs like "Literacy for the Learners' Permit test" run for young disabled people; the special selection of highly visual training materials for the literacy program for low skilled women including indigenous women seeking pre-vocational skills before entry to work; the public small 'talks' and discussion groups without any print material but a back up telephone service for migrant women who wished to clarify or reinforce questions at the Women's Health Centre; and the customised voluntary training program for recent refugees at the Migrant Resource Centre.

Responding to local literacy need: bridges through "Social" literacy

There were some community groups who expressed a need for greater leadership skills in order to improve the quality of their community mentoring and advocacy roles. Members of these groups also perceived a lack of continuity of programs which were aimed at developing community expertise, not only in this case study area, but in many other disadvantaged urban communities.

Community groups reported that some of the unemployment projects which have ceased in 'Selfhelp City included Literacy/Numeracy programs. Whilst the local public provider still undertook this form of basic education for the community, including voluntary tutor training for non profit community groups; they did so within their own institution and not out in community settings. There was an underlying level of suspicion in some community groups, e.g. school drop outs, long term unemployed or redundant individuals with mostly labouring skills, refugees and victims of torture and repression, because of the identification of these programs with institutional settings. How much this suspicion and sensitivity also rested on a (mis)perception by clients of a predominantly monologic mentoring style has yet to be properly researched. Nonetheless proponents of monologic approaches which 'direct' clients to shared understandings and a common world view should keep in mind that this emphasis potentially detracts from their appeal to low skilled clients.

Locally managed literacy programs, based in the community, appeared to have the best attendance of clients and the overall endorsement of the target population. However, their funding was almost impossibly low and the programs ran because of the enormous good will and commitment of significant key

training and management personnel. They regularly worked around their funding difficulties to a spontaneous approximation of the dialogic mentoring style because they often identified with their clients, commonly by being drawn from their ranks. It does not appear that these gifted individuals are being replaced as the natural attrition of time and the ability to continue (un)paid effort takes its toll. Neither are their pedagogical practices well documented, unless by an "inspired amateur". Therefore much valuable teaching experience has constantly to be 're-invented' with changing personnel. Mentoring record keeping and meta critical, reflective practice by organisations within their own ranks is one other aspect of assisting local community groups to achieve skills in a very neglected area of organisational learning and expertise.

'Private' and 'public ' literacy in local practice – implications for mentoring

Distinguishing 'institutional' versus 'vernacular' literacy skills for clients is important. These latter skills should not be devalued against the skills which are required as part of participation in formal institutional settings and procedures. Nonetheless, it was a major finding of this study that sharing 'vernacular' literacy skill relies on key mentors and "trusted brokers" whose skills may not be absolutely reliable, nor their information current. Brokers are trusted because of social capital considerations like their status in networks and their level of responsibility undertaken in various community activities. However, when perceived literacy skills are the sole factor under consideration, to an individual with no or extremely minimal skills, anybody with greater skills looks disproportionately more equipped to deal with daily living. Pointing out to a 'no skills' client that someone in a mentoring role with 'a few skills' may still not be adequate for a wide range of literacy tasks entrusted to them, does not deny the crucial behavioural and interactivity principles which underlie dialogic mentoring. Dialogic mentors of low skills clients should have "just enough" formal literacy training, rating it as important to successful mentoring as the additional valorisation of a community leadership role. Furthermore, where "trusted brokers" have cultural status within ethnic or indigenous communities, the case study found that they offered their skills (though perhaps not with explicit intent) in a value laden context. Their talents were always mediated by ethical, cultural and broader educational concerns and experience. This work agrees that these considerations have immense value in interpersonal transactions. Nonetheless, the lesser skilled recipient of the mentor's ability still needs a minimal 'institutional' proficiency in areas like critical discourse analysis in order to separate out the context of information transfer as well as the usefulness, currency and reliability of the information which is offered by the

"broker". Perhaps the methodology of marginal mentoring, ie "just enough, just in time" may be of relevance here. This is so that the 'institutional' skills which the "trusted broker" or mentor offers do not leave them at risk of the perception by their peers of conversion into a 'hard core' 'institutional' literacy user. This (mis?)perception would lessen the mentor's dialogic value and reduce their ability to serve their community clients and peers.

Meeting need through mentoring

This study revealed that 'vernacular' literacy skill relates largely to identification with the community, within networks, both small and large, which are cultural and recreational as much as socio economic and specifically focused on learning. The practices and curricula of good community programs should be drawn from adult education pedagogy of the highest order of practice and utilise materials which are suitable to habitual users of 'vernacular' literacy. The principle of offering educational opportunities over a whole life time was also an important aspect of building individual skill and community capacity.

There was undoubtedly a strong community infrastructure in place in this particular city. However it was by no means exhaustively explored, developed or exploited. The siting of literacy programs within community contexts may be one way of undertaking the enhancement of social capital to achieve transformative change in this population. (Additionally it may provide a model for other similarly disadvantaged communities in other urban or semi regional settings). Furthermore, venues in which programs were delivered need to take cognizance of the special needs of particular cohorts of low skilled clients, e.g. adolescents in Alternative School settings, the long term unemployed, middle-aged workers, but particularly men, retrenched from manual employment, disabled people, and recent migrants and refugees. Their special needs make them more prone to anticipating or experiencing failure in institutional settings, sometimes to the point where they will not even try to access education or training. Mentoring these groups certainly becomes feasible and easier in congenial circumstances which are within the clients' comfort zone.

Where proactive formal educational policy is concerned, it could be argued that literacy and numeracy programs and materials need to be reflective of positive community participation and local capacity building over an individual and/or the community's life time. This is more than a simple issue of access, predominantly centred on the single measurable outcome of a job for the client. Finally, literacy brokers have a position of 'natural' community leadership and should be actively assisted to maintain the currency and accuracy of the skills and knowledge which they share with other less skilled individuals. Human service clients who lack the necessary critical skills to reflectively assess

everyday literacy tasks should be assisted to develop skills that enable them to access relevant information from literacy brokers in their communities.

Making it happen

At a policy level, it is argued that there should be an integrated approach to the whole client and the whole community, including its service providers, rather than an ad hoc crisis managerial approach to the different elements which constitute disadvantage. The crucial nexus between literacy/numeracy training and increasing employment levels in current funding programs should be challenged on an ethical basis beyond the primary focus on placement into employment. The focus should be a proactive local development model with more community generated impetus for lifelong learning. Individual mentors within community organisations should be adequately resourced for all the record keeping and notation of practice tasks which occur in their activities.

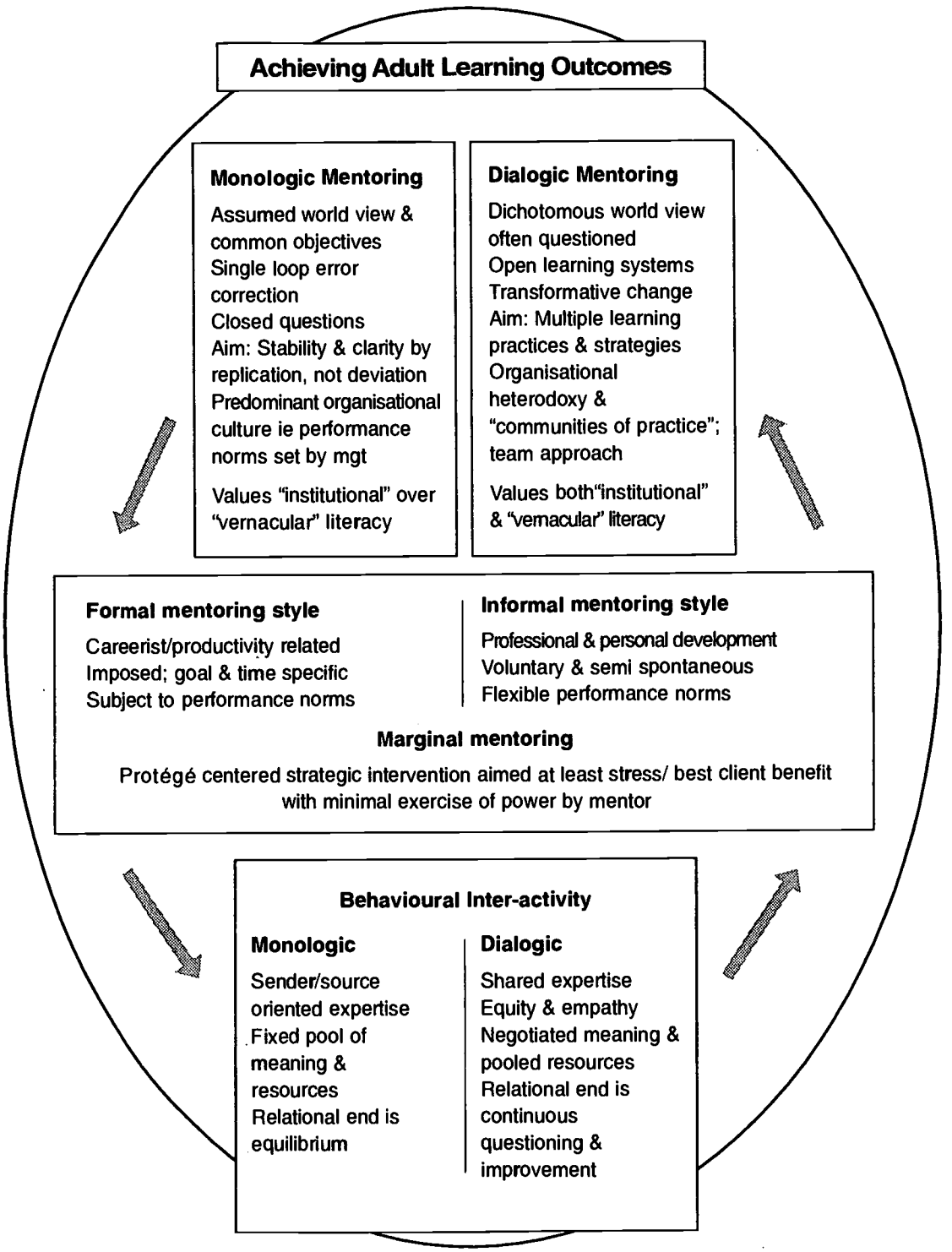
Summary

The following diagram summarises the features of both dialogic and monologic mentoring which have been described by the literature and which were reported in the case study of community literacy brokerage.

The diagram encapsulates the mentoring styles, formal, informal or marginal, which feature in the delivery of mentoring in practice and the interactive behaviour which characterises this mentoring. Finally, it illustrates the relationships which these phenomena have in influencing the overall achievement of adult learning objectives. The two sides of the diagram are not wholly binary opposites but they tend to contrast strongly. In the case of monologic mentoring, the system tends to operate from the top down, whilst power flows more evenly (and is perceived in some situations to emanate from the bottom up) in dialogic mentoring. The characteristics of behaviour and style which are on the "Dialogic" side of this diagram represent good practice to be replicated in delivery to clients. Additionally, the case study indicates that, on balance, informally or marginally mentoring the delivery of literacy/ numeracy services to a low skilled client group approximates the dialogic approach to mentoring these groups.

Conclusion

It is argued that mentoring is the site in organisations and groups where relational development can be experienced and explored. Traditionally understood as learning relationships towards known and accepted ends, when understood in the light of dialogic characteristics, mentoring offers tremendous


Achieving Adult Learning Outcomes
Monologic Mentoring
Assumed world view & common objectives
Single loop error correction
Closed questions
Aim: Stability & clarity by replication, not deviation
Predominant organisational culture ie performance norms set by mgt
Values "institutional" over "vernacular" literacy
Dialogic Mentoring
Dichotomous world view often questioned
Open learning systems
Transformative change
Aim: Multiple learning practices & strategies
Organisational heterodoxy & "communities of practice"; team approach
Values both "institutional" & "vernacular" literacy
Formal mentoring style
Careerist/productivity related
Imposed; goal & time specific
Subject to performance norms
Informal mentoring style
Professional & personal development
Voluntary & semi spontaneous
Flexible performance norms
Marginal mentoring
Protégé centered strategic intervention aimed at least stress/ best client benefit with minimal exercise of power by mentor
Behavioural Inter-activity
Monologic
Sender/source oriented expertise
Fixed pool of meaning & resources
Relational end is equilibrium
Dialogic
Shared expertise
Equity & empathy
Negotiated meaning & pooled resources
Relational end is continuous questioning & improvement

potential as a core, generative, learning practice vital for learning community building by affording

- learning opportunities in real time
- the authenticity of a relationship which makes such learning possible
- safety arising from such authenticity and
- the possibility for a greater diffusion of learning processes as the protégé moves forward in the learning organisation and as mentors are also provided with the opportunity to continue to learn. Organisational members becomes practitioners in learning communities by engaging and maintaining such mentoring relationships.

The examples of spontaneous dialogic mentoring occurring within our community literacy study leads us to conclude that learning can be given power as practice, rather than mere rhetoric, if settings and programs actually enhance successful interactions and outcomes in adult learning activities by participants. Learning opportunities can be realistically offered at times and in contexts which develop individual skills and enhance the whole learning environment. Enhanced literacy practice and use can be further enriched by a systematic program to augment the skills of "trusted brokers". Appreciating the social capital value of the brokers' role in social cohesion and proactive community development can become a form of mentoring activity itself. These possibilities are not confined to brokerage of adult community literacy programs alone but capable of extension to all contexts where adults are offered mentoring assistance to achieve negotiated outcomes in adult learning environments.

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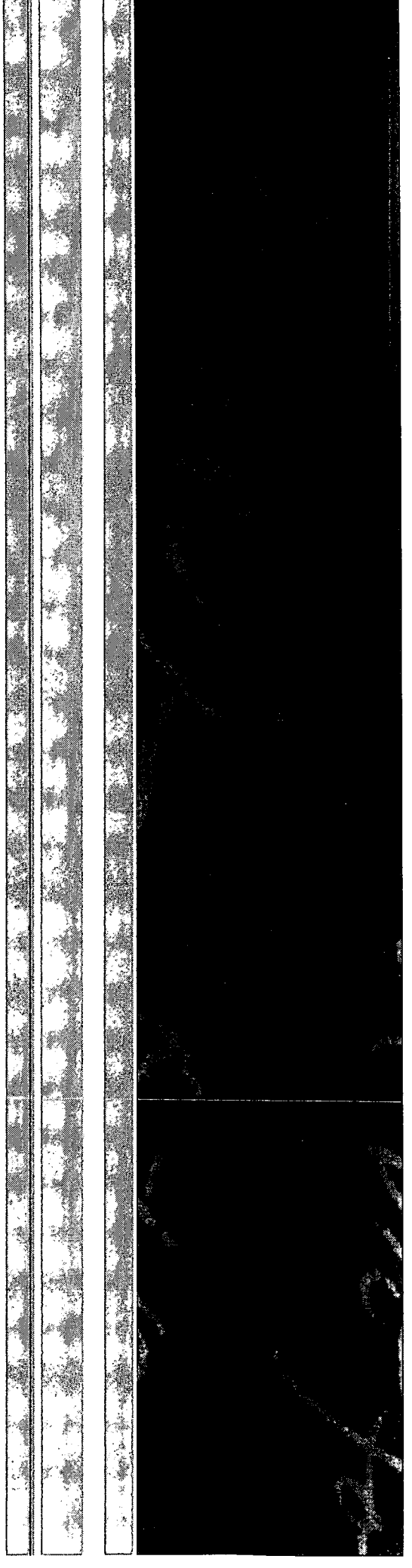

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NATHAN Q. 4111 Australia
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